



Azerbaijan Connections & Exchange

N E W S L E T T E R

Azeri Educators Experience U.S. Culture!

From March 8 to 26, 2005 five Azerbaijani educators traveled to the U.S. for the first phase of a reciprocal educator's exchange, a component of the Azerbaijan Connections and Exchange program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Chosen based on their successful collaboration with American teachers engaging students in online civics projects, the Azeri educators arrived in Burlington, Vermont, where they took part in a six-day training and cultural learning session. While in Vermont, they not only had the opportunity to visit many interesting, historical, and cultural sites but also they were able to visit Montpelier High



L to R: R. Mammadova, V. Khanlarov, G. Mammadzadeh, Counselor I. Mammadov, A. Aliyeva, V. Nabiye, and N. Hadiyeva at the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations

School and St. Albans' Bellows Free Academy to see how civics and technology are integrated into the curriculum. During a visit to the Vermont State House, the delegates were officially recognized and welcomed on the floor of the House of Representatives. Participants also explored community technology training, funding strategies, and news broadcasting in a visit to CyberSkills VT. The teachers completed their Vermont week at the School for International Training, a graduate program offering international educational programming targeting community inclusion and development. While in Vermont, educators received a special glimpse into local maple syrup production and culture at the Morse Farm Sugarhouse.

During the second week of the exchange, participants traveled to their partner communities, lived with their American hosts and experienced the diversity of American culture, lifestyles, and values. They also became familiar with current technology-based practices, various teaching methodologies and the importance of implementing civics in the class-



L to R: A. Aliyeva, G. Mammadzadeh, N. Hadiyeva, R. Mammadova, V. Khanlarov, and V. Nabiye

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PROJECT HARMONY

AZERBAIJAN CONNECTIONS AND EXCHANGE IS A PROGRAM OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND IMPLEMENTED BY PROJECT HARMONY

Teacher Spotlight

The following excerpts were taken from interviews with Ruhangiz Mammadova (RM) Baku School #290, Aytekin Aliyeva (AA) Lenkaran School #5, and Gullar Mammadzadeh (GM) Sumqayit School #27.

PH: After your exchange experience how have you altered your manner of working with your community?

GM: The first thing I planned for and organized right after my return from the United States was a presentation about the exchange program and my experience. As I expected it attracted both teachers and students to join international educational partnerships offered through ACE.

PH: What main values of American culture and education have you brought back to Azerbaijan?

AA: Most of all, I appreciate American teachers' abilities to listen to his/her students and to help encourage development or personal thoughts, which many of our educators do not do here. That is the main significant change I made to my classes.

PH: What are some activities you conducted upon your return home? Why are they important for your community and the school? What challenges do you face in implementing them?

RM: Upon returning home I facilitated the Global Youth Service Day in my community by organizing the clothes and toys drive for the local orphanage. I saw how important and welcomed charity and volunteerism are in the States, which influenced me to promote those activities in my hometown as well.

PH: What have you done with your American partner after your return?

AA: I am still working with my partner from Gallup High School on our joint "Nature and Environment" online project via Web Crossing and email interaction. We are now working on creating the project's website. My students and I created the Gallup High School – Lenkaran School #5 Friendship Corner in our ICC, where we placed photos, posters and child art from our schools. I think that made our ICC more student-friendly.

PH: What effects has the exchange had on your partnership activities after returning to Azerbaijan?

GM: The opportunity to meet and work with each other in-person helped my partner and me to set clearer ideas on what we are going to be doing next. Meeting each other in-person is great, I wish our students could meet their online pals and become real friends.

PH: What, if any, outcomes (results) have you seen from the work with your American partner?

AA: The experience I gained in the United States serves as a success story in my school to encourage our students and teachers to join international educational partnerships.

PH: What do you plan for your partner when he/she comes to Azerbaijan?

RM: I have a lot of plans for the time when Jan arrives in Baku. We will visit educational and medical institutes and ministries. I will arrange for Jan's interview for a local TV station and a newspaper and also boat tours on the Caspian and countryside tours.

PH: How will you continue the development of your partnership project?

RM: We are planning to expand our partnership by increasing the number of schools involved in our online project. While I was in the States, I met with teachers from schools near Lincoln High School, such as Forest Hill High School and Colefax High School. I am currently conducting a presentation for my colleagues to promote our partnership and expand the number of people involved.

room. This component is remembered by participants as the most valuable portion of the exchange.

The final days of the exchange were spent in New York City, where the Azeri teachers met with officials at the Permanent Mission of Azerbaijan to the United Nations to discuss the School Connectivity Program and U.S. / Azeri foreign policy. Participants later toured the Statue of Liberty and Times Square, allowing them a chance to relax amidst the energy of the world's city. The teachers returned to Azerbaijan with a better understanding of U.S. history, culture, and government, and many ideas on how they can combine what they saw in America with their current systems in Azerbaijan. In July 2005, U.S. teachers will complete the reciprocal exchange by traveling to Azerbaijan to better understand the Azerbaijani educational system and culture for inclusion in their U.S. classrooms.

ACE Reaches Sustainability Milestone

Throughout the past three years, the ACE program has had one major goal: to develop sustainable Internet Computer Centers that not only integrate Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) into education, but which also have the ability to generate income making the continuation of these activities possible after U.S. program funds have ended.



Head of Nakhchivan School #12 PTA discussing ICCs sustainability strategies

Five U.S. Educators Selected for Summer Exchange to Azerbaijan

ACE is pleased to announce its selection of five participants for the upcoming U.S.-AZ School Partner Exchange to Azerbaijan. These U.S. teachers represent five states and a variety of educational institutions. Participants include: Christa Bruce (Ketchikan, AK), Jan Caldwell (Lincoln, CA), Christopher Marquardt (Gallup, NM), Margie Cooper (Atlanta, GA), and Anita Bright (Annandale, VA). The three-week exchange, which will take place July 8-26, 2005, will provide educators with an opportunity to experience Azerbaijani culture and society first hand, to establish personal relations with individuals, schools and communities, and to work jointly with Azerbaijani counterparts in creating action plans for future collaboration. Participants will spend a week with host families, where they will have a unique opportunity to experience some of the most ruggedly beautiful settings of the former Soviet Union. With support from Project Harmony staff in the U.S. and Azerbaijan, teachers will receive additional training and learn various methods of incorporating their field experience back into their U.S. classrooms.

Project Harmony is working in two directions to reach this goal. ACE staff has advocated for the Ministry of Education to buy in to the program, through financial and practical support. The Ministry's support has included lobbying the Ministry of Finance to permit ACE schools to open accounts in the Regional Financial Departments. The second direction has been working with two organizations, UNICEF and Reliable Futures (an Azerbaijani Educational NGO) to make Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) a viable force for community involvement in schools.

ACE and UNICEF's PTA programs partnered to deliver online training to parents and teachers to foster a better understanding of how a PTA works for the good of the school and the potential that a con-

nected group of associations around the country could have. At the same time UNICEF and Reliable Futures began the process of registration for a national PTA to serve as an umbrella organization. Registration of non-profit organizations continues to be a challenge to interest groups in Azerbaijan. By having an umbrella organization, each of the local associations will be able to register with the national PTA claiming NGO status with a right to open a legal financial account. With the ability to open a financial account, trained site staff will be able to charge fees for services given to community members. Services may include instruction on Internet usage, web design, and English. The legal registration of the national PTA marks an important sustainability milestone for Azerbaijan's Internet Computer Centers.

Global Youth Service Day in Azerbaijan



Lenkaran School #5 students delivering food from the Cooking Day

Over 160 students voluntarily engaged their communities through service activities during the internationally recognized Global Youth Service Day on April 12. As the National Lead Agency for the Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) in Azerbaijan, Project Harmony joined a coalition of 34 international organizations and more than 150 national coordinating committees worldwide. With the assistance of U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) alumni (the participants of the ACE Exchange program), Project Harmony mobilized significant community resources in four regions of Azerbaijan to address issues of fire prevention, environmental awareness, and assistance for orphaned children and the elderly. In Baku, local fire department employees provided a Fire Precaution training of trainers for student representatives from Baku schools who shared their new skills with other students. Students in Baku also held a clothing and toy drive for local orphanages while students of Quba and Lenkaran conducted a Cooking Day with the assistance of their teachers after which they delivered the meals to the local senior citizens' home and community members. In addition Quba students also organized an art exhibition in their community depicting the benefits of volunteerism. Sumqayit students used their newly acquired web design skills to create an attractive overview of Azerbaijan's GYSD celebration at <http://www.projectharmony.az/gysd2005>.

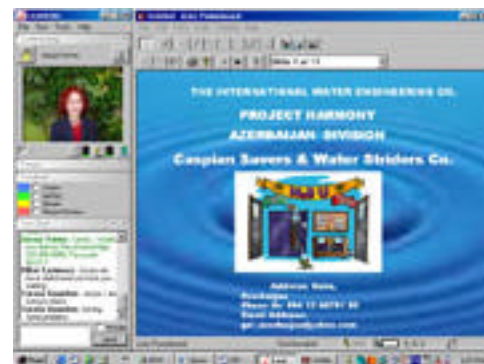
Azeri Students Explore Global Environmental Challenges with International Colleagues

Throughout the spring semester, 43 Azerbaijan Connections and Exchange students from Baku, Ganje, and Goychay applied their research and business skills to the Global Education Initiative's (GEI) "Water Purification and Ecosystem Preservation" project. The participants acted as owners of virtual water purification and ecosystem development firms for which they wrote business plans. Working with a team of peers in South Africa, Nigeria, and the U.S., Azeri students also utilized testing kits sent by GEI for measuring local levels of dissolved oxygen, pH, and water turbidity. The international team of students

also created their own ecosystems to learn the importance of care for the environment and the consequences that their choices and actions have for the world around them. The students used this data to complete their business plans to be placed on GEI's and ACE's respective websites upon completion of the project. On May 12 students presented their business plans to an international panel of



ACE students testing local water samples



Screenshot of GEI international collaboration

judges and each team will be awarded on certificates based on the decision made by the panel.

The John C. Ford Global Education Initiative is a connected global learning community whose mission is to bridge the educational, digital, gender, and cross-cultural divides in economically disadvantaged communities. GEI's goal is to build educational capacity and

global collaboration through innovative science, math, technology and civics programs, enhanced by multimedia technology. The GEI project operates through 15 community-based International Education Hubs in 360 economically disadvantaged communities across the U.S. and in developing countries. The GEI network has expanded to Azerbaijan in partnership with Project Harmony to integrate their innovative math, science, and technology projects with Project Harmony's civics content. Many GEI activities are based on the "International Business Plan" model of project-based learning in which students from GEI's various International Education Hubs collaborate online to produce business plans to market a product, address a scientific challenge, and apply math, science, business, and technology knowledge.

U.S. Ambassador Visits School Computer Center

U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan Reno L. Harnish visited Mingechevir School #3's Internet Computer Center (ICC) on April 4. Dur-

ing the trip Ambassador Harnish participated in a computer training session for students, learned about online projects facilitated by ICC site staff, and evaluated students' websites.



US Ambassador Meeting with Student parliament members at Mingechevir School #3

The school principal proudly informed Ambassador Harnish that the school has sustainably administered the ICC since the school's graduation from the Azerbaijan Connections and Exchange Program. Impressed by the school's efforts, Ambassador Harnish expressed his hope that the school would be able to continue its efforts to bridge the digital divide. Ambassador Harnish later met with U.S. Peace Corps volunteers and members of the IFES Student Action Committee in the school. IFES is an international, nonprofit organization that supports the building of democratic societies.

PROJECT HARMONY

5197 Main Street, Unit 6
Waitsfield, Vermont 05673

TEL: 802-496-4545 FAX: 802-496-4548

ph@projectharmony.org

<http://www.projectharmony.org>

U.S.-Azerbaijan Education Center
183 Suleyman Rahimov Street
Baku 370014, Azerbaijan

TEL/FAX: (994 12) 447-91-90, 447-91-81

<http://www.projectharmony.az>